

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: SOCIAL SERVICES

DATE: JUNE 27, 2013

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS LOEB
KENNY
BENTLEY
STRAINER
WOOD
SOKOL
WESTCOTT

OTHERS PRESENT:

REPRESENTING THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES:
SUZANNE WHEELER, COMMISSIONER
JULIE MONTERO, FISCAL MANAGER
CHRISTIAN HANCHETT, ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE SUPERVISOR
KELLY BARKER, PRINCIPAL SOCIAL WELFARE EXAMINER
REBECCA HILL, SENIOR SOCIAL WELFARE EXAMINER
JANET TRACKEY, SENIOR SOCIAL WELFARE EXAMINER
DEANNA PARK, DIRECTOR OF COUNTRYSIDE ADULT HOME
PAUL DUSEK, COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD
FRANK E. THOMAS, BUDGET OFFICER
SUPERVISORS FRASIER
MASON
MONTESI
TAYLOR
DON LEHMAN, *THE POST STAR*
CHARLENE DiRESTA, SR. LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

Mr. Loeb called the meeting of the Social Services Committee to order at 10:18 a.m.

Motion was made by Mrs. Wood, seconded by Mr. Strainer and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the previous Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Deanna Park, Director of Countryside Adult Home, who distributed copies of the agenda to the Committee members; *a copy of the agenda is on file with the minutes.*

Commencing the agenda review, Ms. Park requested to delete the position of Cook #1 which currently received a stipend of \$5,977 to act as Supervisor for the Department and to create the position of Cook Manager, annual base salary of \$26,370, resulting in a savings to the budget of \$4,951 per year. She noted the employee in the Cook #1 position was retiring and creating the Cook Manager position would eliminate the need for the stipend and amend the Department's Table of Organization more appropriately.

Motion was made by Mr. Strainer and seconded by Mr. Westcott to approve the request to delete the position of Cook #1 and create the position of Cook Manager as outlined above; thereby amending the Department's Table of Organization.

Mr. Strainer inquired as to the reason for the stipend and Paul Dusek, County Administrator, explained that in the past the County had offered stipends for certain positions in order to keep the base salaries for the positions at a certain level. He commented the stipends had been offered to employees who had assumed additional responsibilities. He added the stipends had been eliminated in favor of set salary levels and this position was one of the few remaining positions which included a stipend. Mr. Westcott asked for clarification purposes if the Cook Manager would perform the same job duties as the Cook #1 position had and if the purpose was merely to eliminate the need for the stipend and Ms. Park replied affirmatively. Mr. Loeb noted Ms. Park was also requesting to fill the vacant position of Cook Manager due to creation.

Mr. Strainer amended his motion to include the filling of the vacant position of Cook Manager and Mr. Westcott amended his second to the motion.

Mr. Loeb called the question and the motion was carried unanimously to approve the request to delete the position of Cook #1 and create the position of Cook Manager as outlined above, thereby amending the Department's Table of Organization; to fill the vacant position of Cook Manager due to creation and to forward the requests to the Personnel Committee. *Copies of the resolution request form and the Notice of Intent to Fill Vacant Position form are on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Park requested to extend the existing agreement with Warrensburg Laundry and Dry Cleaning, Inc. to provide patient laundry services at Countryside Adult Home for a term commencing August 20, 2013 and terminating August 19, 2014 in an amount not to exceed \$22,000. She noted Warrensburg Laundry and Dry Cleaning had been completing the laundry services for the facility for the past year and did an excellent job and she pointed out there was no increase in the rate of \$.49 per pound.

Motion was made by Mr. Strainer, seconded by Mr. Bentley and carried unanimously to authorize extension of the existing agreement with Warrensburg Laundry and Dry Cleaning, Inc. as outlined above. *A copy of the resolution request form is on file with the minutes and the necessary resolution was authorized for the July 19, 2013 Board meeting.*

Ms. Park informed the next item on the agenda had been a request for a contract with Rise Engineering to upgrade the exterior lighting at Countryside Adult Home; however, she continued, upon discussion with Mr. Loeb she requested to table this request until the next Committee meeting in order to complete further research.

Pertaining to the pending item concerning a comparison report for the future costs of Countryside Adult Home continuing operations versus closing of the facility, Mr. Loeb stated he believed this request had been satisfied and he requested it be removed from the pending item list. Mr. Strainer requested the location of the Warrensburg Mealsite at Countryside Adult Home and the possible costs associated with its relocation be considered when deciding upon the possible closing of Countryside Adult Home.

Ms. Park reported 86 hours of overtime usage within the last two pay cycles and noted this included the Memorial Day holiday and reflected an increase of 64.95 hours of overtime year-to-date, compared to the same time period in 2012. She pointed out an Overtime Report comparison for 2010 through 2013 was included in the agenda packet. She briefly reviewed the Report and explained that 113.2 overtime hours were used for the week ending February 24, 2013 compared to zero hours for the same week in 2012 which she attributed to President's Day falling within a different pay cycle for the two years.

Ms. Park informed the current census of the facility was 39 residents which consisted of 15 men and 24 women. She said there had been 5 referrals in the past month; 1 of which required nursing home level care; 3 of which were not yet ready to enter an adult home and 1 of which was completing paperwork to enter the Adult Day Care Program. She advised there had been no admissions and 4 discharges for the month.

This concluded the Countryside Adult Home portion of the Committee meeting and the Department of Social Services (DSS) portion commenced at 10:26 a.m.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Suzanne Wheeler, Commissioner of the DSS, who distributed copies of the agenda to the Committee members; *a copy of the agenda is on file with the minutes.*

Mr. Loeb said that State mandates had been discussed at the last Board meeting and he suggested that Department Heads request staff members to look at which mandates were redundant or unnecessary.

Commencing the agenda review, Ms. Wheeler pointed out there were no nominations for Team Leader or Team Player this month.

Mr. Loeb reminded the Committee members that at the previous Committee meeting Mr. Kenny had suggested the County require Welfare recipients to work for their benefits and had given the example of road side pick up crews. Mr. Dusek stated he had looked into establishing the program as suggested by Mr. Kenny and had discovered that such programs were already in place.

Mr. Dusek explained that in 1996 the Federal Government had passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. He said the Act had basically re-made the existing Welfare Program. He stated the Federal Government had combined many of the existing programs which offered assistance and had named the new Program the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program also referred to as Temporary Assistance (TA). Regardless of whether it was referred to as TANF or TA, he continued, this was the Welfare Program which provided assistance to people in need.

Mr. Dusek informed that when the Federal Government established the TANF Program, they had included a work requirement and a requirement for participation rates for the number of recipients required to work. He noted individual States were penalized if they did not achieve the required participation rates of working TANF recipients. He mentioned eligible families receiving TANF benefits were capped at a maximum of 5 years of benefits for their lifetime.

The Welfare Reform Act of 1997, Mr. Dusek said, was enacted by New York State in order to implement the Federal legislation. He pointed out that not all recipients were able bodied adults, as some were children, elderly or disabled adults. He commented the State had an additional Welfare Program called Safety Net. He advised the State had made it clear that their philosophy for the Welfare Program was "work first". He added that training and education were second, if the recipients skill level was so low that they were unemployable. He said local districts, such as the Warren County DSS, were required to start the program with employment activities for the recipient. He added the DSS was also required to complete an Employment Assessment and develop an Employability Plan for each recipient. Mr. Dusek advised that the local Welfare Program in Warren County had to incorporate the State and Federal rules and put those rules into practice.

Mr. Dusek pointed out the County was required to file a Welfare Plan on a bi-annual basis and the current Plan would expire on December 31, 2013. He noted recipients were required to comply with the work plans or they would be sanctioned. He mentioned Warren County had Work Experience Program (WEP) Sites available to eligible participants of the TANF Program. He noted the County was held accountable for the statistics and ensuring that the minimum participation rates were met. He commented the County could review and possibly revise the bi-annual plan which was up for renewal on December 31, 2013.

Mr. Kenny stated the public perception was that there were thousands of people in Warren County who did not work but collected Public Assistance. He reported he had seen people using their EBT (electronic benefit transfer) cards to purchase groceries and who received money back to purchase their cigarettes and beer. He said it was discouraging to see people who needed financial assistance but had the necessary funds to purchase those items. Mr. Kenny asked the number of people in Warren County who were on Public Assistance and the number of those people who participated in a WEP. Mr. Dusek pointed out the system was not perfect and there were those who abused it. He

noted that Safety Net was a supplemental program which did not have the same restrictions as the Federal program.

Ms. Wheeler pointed out the DSS caseload for the month of May was outlined in the agenda packet. She introduced the following employees who would provide more detail about the Public Assistance programs offered by Warren County DSS:

- Kelly Barker, Principal Social Welfare Examiner;
- Rebecca Hill, Senior Social Welfare Examiner; and
- Janet Trackey, Senior Social Welfare Examiner.

Ms. Barker explained the DSS had merged their Temporary Assistance and Employment Units in order to form the Temporary Assistance/Welfare to Work (TA/WTW) Unit. She advised this allowed each Social Welfare Examiner the ability to have complete knowledge of each case and the ability to work on the cases in a comprehensive manner. The primary goal of the TA/WTW Unit, she continued, was to assist their clients in becoming self sufficient. She said the clients of this Unit usually either became employed or collected SSI (Supplemental Security Income) or SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance). She stated the Unit was continually looking for other sources of income for the clients, such as unemployment, Veterans' benefits, child support, alimony, etc., in order to offset the need for TANF. She advised the employment requirements and activities for TANF recipients were numerous but Ms. Hill and Ms. Trackey would provide a brief overview.

Ms. Hill stated she would discuss the activities which took place prior to the opening of a TANF case. She noted her main responsibility was the supervision of pending TANF cases. She reiterated Ms. Barker's comment that the Unit's main goal was to assist the clients in becoming self sufficient. She explained when a person was interviewed for TANF benefits, numerous appointments were scheduled prior to receipt of the benefits. She outlined that all applicants took a mandatory math and literacy test to gauge their educational level and failure to participate in the testing resulted in a case denial. Ms. Hill stated mandatory orientations were held twice a month to assist the applicants in understanding the TA/WTW requirements and the consequences of non-compliance. She commented the application asked the applicant if they were able to work and if the applicant replied affirmatively they were required to submit a minimum of ten job applications per week with a minimum of 30 hours of job search time per week. She explained this was part of the mandatory supervised job search which was reviewed on a weekly basis and failure to attend resulted in the applicant being sanctioned or the case being denied. If an applicant contested their employability, Ms. Hill continued, they were required to have a health care provider or therapist fill out the prescribed medical form within ten days or the case would be denied. She said the medical forms were then reviewed by the Social Welfare Examiner to determine the next course of action. She pointed out if the applicant had a long term disability, they would receive assistance in filing for SSI/SSDI benefits. She noted in most cases the applicant was able to work, although some applicants would have certain limitations or restrictions on the type of work. Ms. Hill explained if the health care provider recommended some type of therapy for the applicant then the therapy became the required activity until they were able to return to full time employment. She advised drug and alcohol assessments were also assigned to determine if therapy was required.

Mr. Westcott asked how the WEP Sites operated and Ms. Hill replied that Ms. Trackey would explain this aspect of the Program during her presentation. Ms. Hill noted WEP Sites could not be assigned at the applicant level as this was based on the calculation of the applicant's grant which would not be awarded until the case was officially opened. Mr. Dusek commented that at the applicant stage of the process, the client was not receiving monetary benefits from Warren County.

Ms. Trackey mentioned each client was categorized into one of three categories: those able to work; those who were unable to work and should pursue SSI/SSDI benefits; and those who could work

with limitations. She noted the TA/WTW Unit worked with the clients who were able to work with and without limitations. She presented examples of working with limitations, such as physical or mental limitations or time restrictions. She explained clients were assigned an employment code which identified them as exempt or non-exempt from participating. She added the non-exempt clients were work limited and the exempt clients were unable to work. She said the exempt clients were monitored to ensure they were receiving the required therapy or medical treatments. She reiterated that clients who were work ready or work limited were engaged in the mandatory supervised job searches immediately and were told their full time job was to look for work. Ms. Trackey explained once the case was opened, if the client was not successful in finding employment, they were assigned to a WEP Site where they were monitored to ensure they were learning the necessary skills. She further explained because the WEP's were directly tied to the amount of benefits received by a recipient, the clients could not be assigned to a WEP Site until after they started to receive benefits. She mentioned the amount of benefits received, divided by the minimum wage, determined the number of hours the client could be assigned to the WEP Site. Supervised Job Search Meetings were held Wednesdays at 10:30 a.m., she continued, and attendance was mandatory unless the client was working. She advised the clients job searches from the previous week were collected and an employee was assigned to verify the job searches were performed.

Pertaining to the required participation rates, Ms. Trackey stated this was tracked using the Case Management System computer program. She noted all aspects of the Welfare Program were tracked using this software. She explained the participation rate was derived from the number of clients who were working the mandatory 20 hours per week (if they have a child under six years old) or 30 hours per week (if they have a child over six years old) divided by the number of clients receiving benefits. She further explained the engagement rate referred to clients who were involved in work or work activities but were not working enough to meet the participation rate. Ms. Trackey announced the Warren County DSS's April 2013 participation rate was 36.4% which was the third highest in New York State. She added the rate for May 2013 was 27% which was in the top ten for the 57 Counties in New York State.

In answer to a question from Mr. Taylor, Ms. Barker explained the WEP Sites did not pay the recipient as their benefits received were considered their salary for employment. A brief discussion ensued pertaining to the cash received by Safety Net recipients in which Ms. Hill explained that rents and utilities were restricted and were paid directly to the landlord or utility company. Ms. Hill explained any remaining funds were deposited onto the EBT card and there were no restrictions on how the money was expended. Mr. Bentley asked if cigarettes and alcohol could still be purchased using the EBT card and he noted he had heard New York State was in danger of losing Federal reimbursements due to the lack of control for these types of purchases. Ms. Hill responded that no directives had been received from the State requiring changes to the program thus far. Mr. Dusek reiterated the system was not perfect and needed adjustments. He advised making payments directly to the landlords and utility companies helped to avoid additional abuse of the benefits.

Discussion ensued.

Continuing with the agenda review, Ms. Wheeler informed Berkshire Farm Center and Services for Youth had indicated they were no longer interested in operating the Detention Home on Gurney Lane; however, she added, they were interested in operating a Group Home at the site and had requested the Board of Supervisors to consider this option. She said Christian Hanchett, Adoption and Foster Care Supervisor, would explain the purpose of group homes. She stated she had received an email that morning from Berkshire Farm indicating they would only be able to afford to operate the Group Home on Gurney Lane if the Board of Supervisors allowed them to house "hard to place" youths.

Mr. Hanchett advised the DSS had recently been informed of Berkshire Farm's intention to close the non-secure detention facility in Warren County due to a decrease in the usage and need for same. He noted changes in laws pertaining to how children were placed had accounted for the decreased need. When Berkshire Farm made the decision to close the Detention Home, he continued, they had considered utilizing the location as a possible Group Home. He explained generally lower level placements of youths were housed in Group Homes. He gave the example of children with minor legal, school or family issues or children who had improved in their program and no longer required a more secure setting. Mr. Hanchett apprised Berkshire Farm would open the Group Home to give local youths the opportunity to stay closer to home. He advised he had attended a meeting with representatives from Berkshire Farm to discuss the options. He stated Warren County did not have a great need for a local Group Home, although it would be a convenience. Following the meeting with Berkshire Farm, he continued, they had decided that in order to afford the facility, they would need to house hard-to-place youths. Mr. Hanchett questioned the need, as hard-to-place youths were not generally housed in Group Homes.

Mr. Loeb asked if any action was needed by this Committee and Mr. Dusek replied in the negative. Mr. Dusek stated when they had met with Berkshire Farm the thought had been that continued use of the building and additional revenue would benefit the County. He noted if Berkshire Farm developed an acceptable business model, then the use of the facility as such would require Committee action. He commented if Berkshire Farm no longer desired use of the facility, decisions on the future use of the building would be the responsibility of the County Facilities Committee.

Continuing, Ms. Wheeler requested to fill the vacant position of Senior Caseworker #5 in the Adult Protective Unit, annual base salary of \$35,385, Grade 15, Employee No. 7301, due to resignation and to backfill any vacant positions resultant of promotion to this position. She noted this was a Union position which was mandated and reimbursed 50% by the Federal Government and 23% by the State. She added the impact to the budget would be a savings of \$9,313 and she commented the current employee had resigned to assume a position with the State.

Following a brief discussion, motion was made by Mr. Sokol, seconded by Mr. Bentley and carried unanimously to approve the request to fill the vacant position of Senior Caseworker #5 as outlined above and to forward same to the Personnel Committee. *A copy of the Notice of Intent to Fill Vacant Position is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Wheeler requested to fill the vacant position of Social Welfare Examiner #13 in the Medicaid Unit, annual base salary of \$30,230, Grade 8, Employee No. 11540, due to resignation and to backfill any vacant positions resultant of promotion to this position. She said this was a Union position which was mandated and reimbursed 50% by the Federal Government and 50% by the State. She reported the impact to the budget would be a savings of \$5,127 and she noted this employee was also resigning to assume a position with the State.

Motion was made by Mrs. Wood, seconded by Mr. Kenny and carried unanimously to approve the request to fill the vacant position of Social Welfare Examiner #13 as outlined above and to forward same to the Personnel Committee. *A copy of the Notice of Intent to Fill Vacant Position is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Wheeler requested authorization for three Caseworkers to attend CW/CPS (Caseworker/Child Protective Services) Response Training in Albany, New York on July 29, 2013 through August 2, 2013 and August 12-16, 2013 using a County fleet vehicle. She noted the training was mandated and the necessary funds had been budgeted.

Motion was made by Mr. Bentley, seconded by Mr. Strainer and carried unanimously to authorize attendance at the Training as outlined above. *A copy of the Authorization to Attend Meeting or Convention form is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Wheeler advised agenda item numbers 5D through 5G reflected requests to authorize the continuation of contractual relationships with various agencies for Youth Development and/or Delinquency Prevention Programs for a term commencing January 1, 2013 and terminating December 31, 2013 in the amounts listed on the attached Schedule "A". She noted renewal of the contracts had been requested by the Youth Bureau Advisory Board.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Bentley and carried unanimously to authorize the extension of the contractual agreements as outlined above. *Copies of the resolution request forms are on file with the minutes and the necessary resolution was authorized for the July 19, 2013 Board meeting.*

Ms. Wheeler stated the next item on the agenda pertained to a discussion on the salary of the Director of Countryside Adult Home. Mr. Loeb commented salary adjustments had been made for certain positions throughout the County based on the results of the salary study conducted at that time. He noted the Director of Countryside Adult Home was paid an annual base salary of \$45,000 which he felt was low given the amount of responsibility assumed by the position. He stated in comparison to other similar positions, he felt the salary should be set in the low to mid \$50,000 range.

Mr. Dusek said when the issue had been brought to his attention he referred to the salary study which had been completed and noticed the data point for the position had been extremely limited. He explained the comparison had been limited to Washington County as it had been difficult to find comparable positions due to the lack of adult home facilities in New York State. He commented a private sector comparison had not been completed during the initial salary study. Mr. Dusek stated he had directed his staff to complete a new salary study for the position and to be as comprehensive as possible. He said over 20 Counties had been contacted and some private adult homes had been included as well. He apprised the salary of the Director of Countryside Adult Home was on the low end of the results which he outlined as follows:

- Chenango County - \$50,646;
- Herkimer County - \$40,000-\$45,000;
- Washington County - \$47,000-\$49,000 with the current Director earning \$52,000;
- Adirondack Manor - \$47,000-\$52,000; and
- Holbrook Adult Home - \$41,000-\$54,000.

Mr. Dusek stated if he had known this information at the time of the original salary study, he would have recommended a salary increase. He said he would recommended the salary of the Director of Countryside Adult Home be set at \$49,500 based on the results of the salary study.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Bentley and carried unanimously to increase the salary of the Director of Countryside Adult Home from \$45,350 to \$49,500, an increase of \$4,150 and to forward same to the Personnel Committee. *A copy of the resolution request form is on file with the minutes.*

As there was no further business to come before the Social Services Committee, on motion made by Mr. Bentley and seconded by Mr. Sokol, Mr. Loeb adjourned the meeting at 11:41 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Charlene DiResta, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist